

Lawyer: FBI enlisted Proud Boys leader to inform on antifa

Associated Press

FBI agents recruited a Proud Boys leader to provide them with information about antifa networks months before he was charged with storming the U.S. Capitol with other members of the far-right extremist group, a defense attorney says.

Proud Boys "thought leader" and organizer Joseph Biggs agreed to provide the FBI with information about anti-fascist activists in Florida and elsewhere after an agent contacted him in late July 2020 and arranged to meet at a restaurant, Biggs' lawyer, J. Daniel Hull, wrote Monday in a court filing.

The two agents who met with Biggs wanted to know what he was "seeing on the ground," Hull said. Over the next few weeks, Biggs answered an agent's follow-up questions in a series of phone calls.

"They spoke often," added Hull, who is petitioning a judge to keep Biggs out of jail pending trial.

The defense lawyer's claims buttress a widely held view among left-leaning ideo-



In this Jan. 6, 2021, photo, Proud Boys members Ethan Nordean, left, and Zachary Rehl walk toward the U.S. Capitol in Washington, in support of President Donald Trump.

Associated Press

logical opponents of the Proud Boys that law enforcement has coddled them, condoned their

violence and even protected them during their frequent street brawls with anti-fascists. The Proud Boys

even have counted some law enforcement officers among their ranks, including a Connecticut police

officer and a Louisiana sheriff's deputy.

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In this Aug. 17, 2019 file photo organizer Joe Biggs, in green hat, and Proud Boys Chairman Enrique Tarrio, holding megaphone, march with members of the Proud Boys and other right-wing demonstrators march across the Hawthorne Bridge during a rally in Portland, Ore.

Associated Press

Continued from Front

Biggs also received "cautionary" phone calls from FBI agents and routinely spoke with local and federal law enforcement officials in Portland, Oregon, about rallies he was planning there in 2019 and 2020, according to Hull.

"These talks were intended both to inform law enforcement about Proud Boy activities in Portland on a courtesy basis but also to ask for advice on planned marches or demonstrations, i.e., what march routes to take on Portland streets, where to go, where not to go," Hull wrote.

FBI Director Christopher Wray has said there was no evidence that antifa was to blame for the Jan. 6 violence. But that hasn't stopped some on the right from making the claims.

Antifa was the Trump administration's villainous scapegoat for much of last year's social unrest following the death of George Floyd. Trump and then-Attorney General William Barr blamed antifa activists for some of the violence at protests over police killings of Black people across the U.S.

The FBI and the Justice Department had launched a number of investigations into extremist groups around that time. They were focused on whether people were violating federal law by crossing state lines to commit violence or whether anyone was paying to send antifa followers to commit violence, a law enforcement official told The Associated Press. The official could not discuss the investigations publicly

and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity. FBI agents responded to police stations in several cities, including New York, to question suspects arrested during protests and focused on those who self-identified as followers of the movement, the official said.

But investigators struggled to make any cases, in part because there is no hierarchical structure to antifa; it's not a single organization but rather an umbrella term for far-left-leaning militant groups that confront or resist neo-Nazis and white supremacists at demonstrations, according to the official.

The FBI would not comment on why agents were meeting with Biggs or why the bureau was trying to solicit information about antifa

through the Proud Boys. Biggs, 37, of Ormond Beach, Florida, wouldn't be the first Proud Boys informant. The group's chairman and top leader, Enrique Tarrio, previously worked undercover and cooperated with investigators after he was accused of fraud in 2012, court documents show.

Eric Ward, executive director of the Portland-based Western States Center, which tracks hate groups, said it was "deeply concerning" to learn that Biggs had worked with the FBI, particularly because law enforcement has "frequently maintained inappropriately close relations with far-right groups." The Proud Boys actively promoted violence and street brawling at the rallies in Portland, he said, and Biggs "called for violence in the streets."

"Law enforcement has no credible reason for working with someone like Biggs. It's long past time for a clear accounting of institutional and professional law enforcement relationships with groups espousing political violence at home and abroad," Ward wrote in an email.

Biggs and three other Proud Boys leaders were indicted March 10 on charges that they planned and carried out a coordinated attack on the Capitol on Jan. 6 to stop Congress from certifying President Joe Biden's electoral victory. At least 20 others in the group have been charged in federal court with offenses related to the riots out of about 350 people charged so far in the deadly riot.

Proud Boys members describe themselves as a politically incorrect men's club for "Western chauvinists." Vice Media co-founder Gavin McInnes, who founded the Proud Boys in 2016, sued the Southern Poverty Law Center for labeling it as a hate group. □

In response, the law center said Proud Boys members often spread "outright bigotry" over the internet and have posted social media pictures of themselves with prominent Holocaust deniers, white nationalists and "known neo-Nazis."

Justice Department prosecutors want to jail Biggs while he and the others await trial because he "presents a danger not only based on his own potential violence, but violence by others who undoubtedly still support him."

But Biggs' lawyer said the incarceration bid hinges on evidence that is speculative at best.

"Importantly, the FBI has known about his political commentary and role in planning events and counter-protests in Portland and other cities since at least July 2020 and arguably benefitted from that knowledge in efforts to gather intelligence about Antifa in Florida and Antifa networks operating across the United States," Hull wrote.

The disclosures are reminiscent of an earlier collaboration between law enforcement and a right-wing group in Portland during repeated clashes between left- and right-wing demonstrators. The far-right group Patriot Prayer staged multiple rallies and marches in the liberal city, drawing out hundreds of residents to oppose its message in standoffs that sometimes ended in violence.

In 2019, Portland opened an internal investigation after more than 11,500 text messages between Patriot

Prayer founder Joey Gibson and police Lt. Jeff Niiya became public. Niiya was cleared in the investigation, but the episode led to training and changes in the way liaison officers communicate with groups before and during planned protests. □

Over 4,000 migrants, many kids, crowded into Texas facility



Young migrants get processed at the intake area of the Donna Department of Homeland Security holding facility, the main detention center for unaccompanied children in the Rio Grande Valley, in Donna, Texas, Tuesday, March 30, 2021.

Associated Press

By ELLIOT SPAGAT and NOMAAN MERCHANT

Associated Press

DONNA, Texas (AP) — The Biden administration for the first time Tuesday allowed journalists inside its main border detention facility for migrant children, revealing a severely overcrowded tent structure where more than 4,000 migrants, including children and families, were crammed into pods and the youngest kept in a large play pen

with mats on the floor for sleeping. With thousands of children and families arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border in recent weeks and packing facilities, President Joe Biden has been under pressure to bring more transparency to the process. U.S. Customs and Border Protection allowed two journalists from The Associated Press and a crew from CBS to tour the facility in Donna, Texas, in the Rio Grande Valley. The facility has a capacity of 250

but more than 4,100 people were being housed on the property Tuesday. Most were unaccompanied children processed in tents before being taken to shelters run by the Department of Health and Human Services and then placed with a family member, relative or sponsor.

The children were being housed by the hundreds in eight pods about 3,200 square feet (297 square meters) in size.

Many of the pods had more than 500 children in them.

Oscar Escamilla, acting executive officer of the U.S. Border Patrol in the Rio Grande Valley, said 250 to 300 kids enter daily and far fewer leave.

"That number is so lopsided," said Escamilla.

On Tuesday, journalists watched children being processed. They went into a small room for lice inspection and a health check. Their hair was hosed down and towels were tossed in a black bin marked "Lice." The minors — many of whom have made long journeys to get to the border, including stretches on foot — were also checked for scabies, fever and other ailments. No COVID-19 test was administered unless a child showed symptoms.

Nurse practitioners also gave psychological tests, asking children if they had suicidal thoughts. All shoelaces were removed to avoid harm to anyone.

The children were then led down a green turf hall to a large intake room. Those 14 and older are fingerprinted and have their photo taken; younger children did not.

Then they were taken to a second intake room where they got notices to appear for immigration court. Border Patrol agents asked them if they had a contact in the U.S. and allowed the child to speak with them by phone.

Children were given bracelets with a barcode that shows history of when they showered and medical conditions.

Outside the facility, the roar of construction equipment could be heard along with air conditioning units. □

Justice Department to review how best to fight hate crimes

By MICHAEL BALSAMO

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General Merrick Garland on Tuesday ordered a review of how the Justice Department can best deploy its resources to combat hate crimes during a surge in incidents targeting Asian Americans.

Garland issued a department-wide memo announcing the 30-day review, citing the "recent rise in hate crimes and hate incidents, particularly the disturbing trend in reports of violence against members of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community since the start of the pandemic."

The memo comes as a number of police departments across the U.S. are reporting an uptick in

hate crimes and attacks on Asian Americans and as lawmakers and community leaders have been increasingly outspoken about the need for the federal government to do more to combat hate crimes.

In July, about 150 members of Congress called on the Justice Department to take action against crimes targeting Asian Americans, and last week a bipartisan group of former U.S. attorneys penned an open letter expressing support for the Asian American community and condemning acts of hatred against any group.

For federal officials to combat the trend, federal prosecutors and law enforcement officials should place an emphasis on investigat-

ing and prosecuting hate crimes, while increasing community outreach, Garland said. They should also focus on improving the FBI's collection of data on hate crimes, which is "critical to understanding the evolving nature and extent of hate crimes and hate incidents in all their forms," he wrote in the memo.

A main criticism from lawmakers and civil rights groups has been that the U.S. government vastly undercounts hate crimes because the FBI's reporting system is voluntary. In some states, just 5% of police departments reported any hate crimes last year.

"We must recommit ourselves to this urgent task and ensure that the Department makes the best

and most effective use of its resources to combat hate," the memo says.

The review is aimed at determining how the Justice Department can better prioritize investigations and prosecutions, increase and track reporting of hate crimes and other incidents that could violate federal law and use civil remedies to address bias incidents that don't amount to federal hate crimes.

It will also seek to ensure each of the 94 U.S. attorney's offices across the country has resources dedicated to identifying hate crimes and bias incidents and review how the department can better engage with communities, among other things. □

Video shows vicious attack of Asian American woman in NYC

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and KAREN MATTHEWS

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A vicious attack on an Asian American woman as she walked to church near New York City's Times Square is drawing widespread condemnation and raising alarms about the failure of bystanders to intervene amid a rash of anti-Asian violence across the U.S.

A lone assailant was seen on surveillance video late Monday morning, kicking the 65-year-old woman in the stomach, knocking her to the ground and stomping on her face, all as police say he shouted anti-Asian slurs and told her, "you don't belong here." The attack happened outside an apartment building two blocks from Times Square, a bustling, heavily policed section of midtown Manhattan known as the "Crossroads of the World." Two workers inside the building who appeared to be security guards were seen on the video witnessing the attack but failing to come to the woman's aid. Their union said they called for help immediately. The attacker was able to casually walk away while onlookers watched, the video



This image taken from surveillance video provided by the New York City Police Department shows a person of interest in connection with an assault of an Asian American woman, Monday, March 29, 2021, in New York.

Associated Press

showed.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio called the video of the attack "absolutely disgusting and outrageous" and said it was "absolutely unacceptable" that witnesses did not intervene.

"I don't care who you are, I don't care what you do, you've got to help your fellow New Yorker," de Blasio said Tuesday at his daily news briefing.

"If you see someone being attacked, do whatever you can," he said. "Make noise. Call out what's happening. Go and try and help. Immediately call for help. Call 911. This is something where we all have to be part of the solution. We can't just

stand back and watch a heinous act happening."

Mayoral candidate Andrew Yang, the son of Taiwanese immigrants, said the victim "could easily have been my mother." He too criticized the bystanders, saying their inaction was "exactly the opposite of what we need here in New York City."

The attack comes amid a national spike in anti-Asian hate crimes, and happened just weeks after a mass shooting in Atlanta that left eight people dead, six of them women of Asian descent. The surge in violence has been linked in part to misplaced blame for the coronavirus

and former President Donald Trump's use of racially charged terms like "Chinese virus."

This year in New York City there have been 33 hate crimes with an Asian victim as of Sunday, police said. There were 11 such attacks by the same time last year. On Friday, in the same neighborhood as Monday's attack, a 65-year-old Asian American woman was accosted by a man waving an unknown object and shouting anti-Asian insults. A 48-year-old man was arrested the next day and charged with menacing. He is not suspected in Monday's attack.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo called Monday's attack "horrifying and repugnant" and he ordered a state police hate crimes task force to offer its assistance to the NYPD. No arrests have been made.

The NYPD's Hate Crime Task Force, which is investigating the attack, released surveillance video of the attack and photographs of the suspect Monday evening and asked anyone with information to contact the department's confidential hot line or submit tips online.

The woman attacked Mon-

day was hospitalized with serious injuries. She was in stable condition on Tuesday, a hospital spokesperson said.

According to video footage of the assault Monday, two people who appeared to be security guards walked into the frame and one of them closed the building door as the woman was on the ground.

The property developer and manager of the building, Brodsky Organization, wrote on Instagram that it was aware of the assault and said staff members who witnessed it were suspended pending an investigation.

The head of the union representing building workers disputed allegations that the door staff failed to act. He said the union has information that they called for help immediately.

"Our union is working to get further details for a more complete account, and urges the public to avoid a rush to judgment while the facts are determined," SEIU 32BJ President Kyle Bragg said in a written statement. He condemned the attack as "yet another example of the unbridled hate and terror" against Asian-Americans. □

Court lets woman's defamation suit vs. Trump proceed again



In this Oct. 18, 2018 file photo, former "Apprentice" contestant Summer Zervos leaves New York state appellate court in New York.

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump could face questioning under oath about a former "Apprentice" contestant's sexual assault allegations against him, following a rul-

ing from New York's highest court Tuesday.

Evidence-gathering has been on hold in Summer Zervos' defamation lawsuit since Trump asked the high court last year to declare

the that the presidency protected him from being sued in state courts. In a one-sentence ruling, the Court of Appeals tossed Trump's appeal as moot now that he's out of the White House.

Lawyers for the woman, Summer Zervos, had asked the high court to nix the appeal and return her defamation suit to a trial court for both sides to continue pretrial evidence-seeking that could eventually enable Zervos' lawyers to quiz Trump under oath, and his to question her. Deadlines for such questioning, known as a deposition, had been set for last year before Trump appealed to the high court.

"Now a private citizen, the defendant has no further

excuse to delay justice for Ms. Zervos, and we are eager to get back to the trial court and prove her claims," lawyers Beth Wilkinson and Moira Penza said in a statement Tuesday.

A request for comment was sent to Trump's lawyers. Zervos' attorneys said in a court filing last month that Trump's lawyers didn't oppose dismissing the appeal.

Zervos is suing Trump for calling her a liar after she went public during his 2016 campaign with allegations that he subjected her to unwanted kissing and groping twice in 2007. She had appeared on his reality show "The Apprentice" in 2006 and said she was looking only for career ad-

vice when she contacted him afterward.

She sued after he retweeted a message calling her claims "a hoax" and described women who accused him of sexual assault and harassment as "liars" trying to hurt his presidential chances.

Trump lawyer Marc Kasowitz has said that the former president's statements were true and protected by free speech rights and that Zervos' claims are meritless.

Zervos is seeking a retraction, an apology and damages.

The Associated Press generally does not identify people who say they have been sexually assaulted, unless they come forward publicly. □

E.U., U.S. pledge more than \$1 billion to tackle Syria's crisis

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union and the United States pledged a combined \$1.2 billion in aid Tuesday to help tackle war-ravaged Syria's deepening humanitarian and economic crises.

The promise of aid comes amid a worsening coronavirus pandemic and as the war enters its 11th year without a political solution in sight. The 27-nation EU and the U.S. announced their commitments on the final day of an annual pledging event co-hosted by the United Nations.

The virtual event gathered dozens of countries and international organizations. The total amount pledged was expected to be announced Tuesday night.

The U.N. and other aid groups are seeking more than \$4 billion for aid to Syria at this year's conference, their biggest appeal yet. Another \$5.8 billion is requested for nearly 6 million Syrian refugees who fled their homeland.

Underscoring the added suffering imposed on Syrians by the COVID-19 crisis, the EU's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, said the bloc's pledge of 560 million euros (\$656.6 million) was equal to the amount pledged last



European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell speaks during an online joint news conference with UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock at the conclusion of a conference 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region' at the European Commission headquarters in Brussels, Tuesday, March 30, 2021.

Associated Press

year.

"This is not something to be celebrated. It just shows how tragic and prolonged the situation is for the Syrian people," he said.

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield announced more than \$596 million in U.S. humanitarian assistance. The State Department said the aid will benefit people in Syria and refugees in neighboring Turkey,

Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.

The decade of bloodshed in Syria has killed more than a half million people and sparked an exodus of refugees that has destabilized neighboring countries and impacted Europe. According to the U.N., 13.4 million people in Syria more than half the country's pre-war population need assistance. That's a 20% increase from last year.

Amid the coronavirus pandemic, Syria's humanitarian situation has worsened. The local currency has crashed and food prices have soared increasing by 222% from last year. Nine out of 10 people live below the poverty line and in northwestern Syria, an area that is held by the rebels, close to three-quarters of the 4.3 million residents are food insecure.

"The situation for Syrians

in their own country and neighboring countries is worse than it has been at any time really over the previous nine years" U.N. humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock said. "There is less violence, but there is more suffering."

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas pledged 1.738 billion euros (\$2 billion) on Germany's behalf Tuesday, an amount he described as the country's largest pledge in the last four years.

"The Syrian tragedy must not last another ten years," he said. "Ending it begins by restoring hope."

Meanwhile, the United Kingdom cut its pledge to "at least" 205 million pounds (\$281 million), compared to 300 million (\$411.8 million) last year.

"Coming just weeks after the 10-year anniversary of the conflict, this decision is deeply concerning, especially given the high impact that British aid has had over the last ten years," said David Miliband, president of the International Rescue Committee aid group.

Calling for a political resolution of the conflict, Borrell said the future of Syria "belongs to none of the factions and to none of the outside powers. □

International court upholds Congolese warlord's conviction

By MIKE CORDER
Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — International Criminal Court appeals judges on Tuesday upheld the

convictions and 30-year prison sentence of a Congolese warlord known as "The Terminator" who was found guilty of crimes including murder, rape and

sexual slavery. Bosco Ntaganda was convicted in July 2019 for his role as a commander of rebels responsible for atrocities committed during a brutal ethnic conflict in a mineral-rich region of Congo in 2002-2003.

The global court found him guilty of a total of 18 counts of crimes against humanity and war crimes.

On Tuesday, a five-judge appeals panel rejected all 15 of Ntaganda's challenges to the convictions and also upheld his sentence.

The judges also rejected an appeal by prosecutors challenging a legal point in the original trial decision. "The appeals chamber confirms by a majority the

conviction decision and rejects the appeal lodged by Mr Ntaganda and the prosecutor," Presiding Judge Howard Morrison said.

Ntaganda, wearing a facemask for the hearing, sat impassively as Morrison read out a lengthy summary of the appeals chamber's findings.

Ntaganda became a symbol for impunity in Africa in the years between his indictment and his surrender to the court in 2013. He has always insisted he was innocent.

Judges at his trial disagreed, saying he was guilty as a direct perpetrator of a murder and as an indirect co-perpetrator of crimes committed by his

rebel militia forces including murders, rapes of men and women, a massacre in a banana field and of enlisting and using child soldiers.

Ntaganda himself used child soldiers as bodyguards in his position as deputy chief of staff and commander of operations for the Patriotic Forces for the Liberation of Congo rebel group. The force's leader, Thomas Lubanga, was convicted by the ICC in 2012 of using child soldiers.

He is serving a 14-year prison sentence.

Earlier this month, ICC judges awarded victims of Ntaganda's crimes \$30 million in reparations. □



Rwandan-born warlord Bosco Ntaganda is seen during his first appearance before judges of the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands, Tuesday March 26, 2013.

Associated Press

Newlywed militant suspects blamed in Indonesia church attack

By YUSUF WAHIL and NINIEK KARMINI

Associated Press

MAKASSAR, Indonesia (AP)

— A recently married couple with suspected militant links used pressure cooker bombs to blow themselves up outside a Roman Catholic cathedral during Palm Sunday Mass, Indonesian officials said Monday.

The attack wounded 20 people, including four church guards, and broke windows at the church and nearby buildings in Makassar, the capital of South Sulawesi province.

The couple were married six months ago and police were investigating their house in Makassar, National Police spokesperson Argo Yuwono said.

Police identified them only by their initials, L and his wife, YSF. Neighbors of the couple identified the man as Lukman and his wife as Dewi and said they were between 23 and 26 years old. The attackers detonated their bombs when they were confronted by guards outside the church.

The pressure cookers contained explosive materials and nails to increase their harm to victims, said



Members of a police bomb squad inspect the wreckage of a motorbike used to carry out Sunday's suicide bomb attack at the Sacred Heart of Jesus Cathedral in Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, Monday, March 29, 2021.

Associated Press

Makassar city police chief Witnu Urip Laksana.

Police carried out DNA tests to determine the attackers' identities, Laksana said.

The couple were believed to have been members of Jemaah Anshorut Daulah, which has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group and carried out a series of suicide bombings in Indonesia. They included a 2016 Starbucks attack in

Jakarta which killed four civilians and four militants, an attack on a bus terminal in the capital that killed three police officers and an attack on a church in Kalimantan that killed a 2-year-old girl a year later. Several other children suffered serious burns in the Kalimantan attack.

Indonesia's last major militant attack was in May 2018, when two families

carried out suicide bombings on churches in Surabaya, killing a dozen people including two young girls whose parents involved them in one of the attacks. Police said the father was the leader of a local affiliate of Jemaah Anshorut Daulah.

One of the attackers in Makassar was believed to have had links to a 2019 suicide attack that killed

23 people at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral in the Philippine province of Sulu, Indonesian National Police Chief Listyo Sigit Prabowo said.

He said the two attackers were linked to a group of suspected militants arrested in Makassar on Jan. 6, when a police counterterrorism squad killed two suspected militants and arrested 19 others. The two men who were killed were being sought for their alleged role in the Philippine attack.

Prabowo told reporters on Monday that the police elite counterterrorism squad, known as Densus 88, arrested four suspected militants believed to have links with the attackers in a raid Sunday in Bima, a city on Sumbawa island in West Nusa Tenggara province. Another suspect was arrested a day later in a separate raid in the province, he said.

The five suspects were in the same Quran study group as the two alleged attackers, Prabowo said. Before he died, the man left a will to his parents, saying goodbye and that he was ready to become a martyr. □

N. Korea calls South's leader 'a parrot raised by America'

By HYUNG-JIN KIM

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP)

— North Korea called South Korea's president "a parrot raised by America" Tuesday, resuming its trademark derisive rhetoric against its rivals amid renewed animosities on the Korean Peninsula.

Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, issued the latest verbal salvo after South Korean President Moon Jae-in criticized the North's missile launches last week. She said Moon's "illogical and brazen-faced" comments echoed the U.S. stance.

"We can hardly repress astonishment at his shamelessness," Kim Yo Jong said in a statement carried by the North's state media.

"He cannot feel sorry for being 'praised' as a parrot raised by America."

Seoul's Unification Ministry expressed "strong regret" over her statement, saying that the two Koreas must

observe "the rules of minimum etiquette in any circumstance."

Kim Yo Jong once enjoyed an image of "a peace messenger" in South Korea after she visited Seoul and



In this Feb. 11, 2018, file photo, Kim Yo Jong, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's powerful sister, listens to South Korean President Moon Jae-in, right, during a performance of North Korea's Samjiyon Orchestra at National Theater in Seoul, South Korea.

Associated Press

conveyed Moon her brother's invitation to visit Pyongyang in early 2018. But since ties turned strained again later, she's taken the lead in anti-Seoul rhetoric. The United States, South Korea and others condemned North Korea over its firings of two ballistic missile launches into the sea, the first such weapons tests in a year. North Korea has argued it has sovereign rights to perform such weapons tests to cope with U.S. military threats. But U.N. Security Council resolutions ban ballistic missile and nuclear tests by North Korea which they say pose a threat to international peace.

On Saturday, Ri Pyong Chol, a top deputy to Kim Jong Un, called President Joe Biden's criticism of the

North's missile tests a provocation and encroachment on the North's right to self-defense. Ri said it was "gangster-like logic" for Washington to criticize the North's launches while the U.S. freely tested intercontinental ballistic missiles.

North Korea has a history of using colorfully harsh insults against rivals. Before entering now-stalled nuclear talks with the United States in 2018, Kim Jong Un called then President Donald Trump "the mentally deranged U.S. dotard" after Trump called him a "little rocket man." In 2019, North Korea called Biden, then a presidential hopeful, a "rabid dog" and a "fool of low IQ" when it criticized his comments about its leadership. □

Report: Military cleanup in Puerto Rico islands slow-going

By DÁNICA COTO
SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP)

— The reopening of hiking trails and various white-sand beaches on two tiny Puerto Rican islands long used as Navy bombing ranges and now popular with tourists will be delayed more than a decade, according to a federal report released Friday.

Cleanup efforts in Vieques and Culebra led respectively by the U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will continue through 2032 at an additional cost of \$420 million for a total of \$800 million, stated the U.S. Government Accountability Office.

"Substantial work remains," the report stated. "Challenges include logistics, the islands' topography and environment, and the safety concerns around handling unexploded munitions. The Navy also faces challenges on Vieques with community distrust of the military handling cleanup efforts."

So far, crews have removed munition including



In this Jan. 13, 2017 file photo, a gate stands closed near Ferro Port lighthouse at Verdiales Key point on the south coast of Vieques island, Puerto Rico.

32,000 bombs, 12,000 grenades and 1,300 rockets from Vieques, where the U.S. government relocated residents when the Navy began using the island as a training range in the 1940s. Meanwhile, crews have cleared more than 5,000 unexploded ordnances

since January 2020 in Culebra, where the military ceased all activities in 1975. An unknown number of munitions remains on both islands located just east of Puerto Rico as teams use tools ranging from machetes to drones to help clean the area.

In addition, the Navy identified perchlorate in the groundwater in at least one site in Vieques, where it operated a training range on 14,500 acres until its closure in 2001. The area was later designated as a Superfund site believed to contain mercury, lead, napalm, de-

pleted uranium and other contaminants.

The GAO said that substantial work remains to be done in one site that covers some 11,500 acres underwater and extends from Vieques' shoreline to a depth of 10 to 15 feet. Meanwhile, cleanup at 14 of 15 former military sites in Culebra will continue through fiscal year 2031, the agency said. The report noted, however, that the U.S. Navy expects some 5,000 acres in Vieques might open by 2021 for hiking and other activities.

Overall, the report's findings are a disappointment to many of those who live in Vieques and Culebra and to Puerto Rico's government, whose robust tourism sector represents only 7 percent of the U.S. territory's economy but has remained afloat despite a more than decade-long economic crisis. The beaches that are open in Vieques and Culebra attract tens of thousands of tourists a year, and officials were hoping to increase that number. □

UN: Increase in child migrants through dangerous Darien Gap

PANAMA CITY (AP) — The number of child migrants passing through the perilous Darien Gap between Colombia and Panama has risen dramatically, the U.N. child welfare agency said Monday.

While underage migrants made up only about 2% of those using the jungle corridor in 2017, in 2020 children comprised 25% of the migrants making the hard trek on foot, UNICEF's report said.



In this Feb. 10, 2021 file photo, a migrant and his children cross the Tuquesa river after a trip on foot through the jungle to Bajo Chiquito, Darien Province, Panama.

Associated Press

The Darien Gap is a 60-mile (97-kilometer) stretch of roadless jungle that provides the only land route north out of South America. There is little food or shelter on the week-long trek and bandits and wild animals prey on migrants. Most migrants making the hike are from Haiti or Cuba, with smaller numbers from African nations such as Cameroon and Congo and South Asian countries India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

"I have seen women coming out of the jungle with babies in their arms after walking for more than seven days without water, food or any type of protection," said Jean Gough, the UNICEF regional director who made a two-day trip to the zone. □

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Elevate your Easter: Sublime seafood at Aruba's Aqua-Grill

PALM BEACH — For sublime seafood in Aruba go to the island's Premiere Seafood restaurant: Aqua Grill. This seafood-heaven place is already a statement for years with a consistency in upscale dining and top service. If you like to savor your seafood, this is your plunge. We promise you that you will get hooked. The 2nd of April till the 5th of April they offer you an excellent Easter menu.

The glow of Aqua Grill is obvious by entering the restaurant. The eclectic of a modern and a traditional New England fish house style appeal and the open-view kitchen adds to the thrill. Let's see what is on the Easter menu.

The Oyster bar Selection seduces you with Duxbury (Massachusetts), Billingsgate Lighthouse (Massachusetts) or Brookhaven (Massachusetts).

For the \$ 60 special menu you get to choose an appetizer between Spicy Tuna Tartar, West Indian Fish Cakes and Caribbean Seafood

Chowder, all delicious and as fresh as you can get.

Make room for the entrance of Blackened Salmon (With sweet potato and asparagus, sweet and spicy red pepper compote) or West Indian Curried Shrimp (Sautéed in a local coconut-curry sauce with jardinière vegetables, basmati rice pilaf and sweet plantains) or Lamb Rack (Grilled and served with potato-zucchini roll, jardinière vegetables and a port wine and pomme mustard sauce).

Sweetheart, it can't get any better than ending the culinary journey with Cheesecake or Coconut Flan or Key Lime Pie. It is simply the perfect ride.

If deep down delicious seafood is what you are craving for then this is exactly what you will get. Welcome in the theatre of the sea, let us entertain you. One thing is for certain: Chef Scott Scheuerman and his team are famous for getting people hooked, just like the fish on your plate. You will get the taste of home fused with Caribbean while dining in elegance. Aqua Grill reaped accolades from such prestigious travel publications



as Fodor's, who says, "This hip restaurant is heaven on earth for seafood lovers, who will find fresh fish galore..."

'A Scheuer thing'

American-born Scheuerman, executive chef of Aqua Grill, is thrilled about 'his restaurant'. "We started out as a New England style seafood restaurant, patterned after Boston style. But we quickly blended into some Caribbean, local flair... if you will. We do still offer the traditional New England dishes like whole Maine lobster, northern seafood plates like the salmon, tuna and swordfish. We buy also from the local fisherman to offer Caribbean dishes like snapper and grou-

per which are number one sellers in our restaurant being the most prevalent local fishes. Catches like wahoo, mahi mahi and brasil are welcome too, anything that comes out of the water we embrace." □

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affordable, green solutions

EAGLE BEACH — Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort is the proud host of the German delegation of engineers, architects, and other experts on sustainability solutions who were in Aruba to present at the German Green Technology Conference 2021, Smart Buildings for Sustainable Caribbean Islands.

Distinguished speakers and experts gathered on the island on March 24th to discuss the possibilities and energy-saving potential of sustainable buildings. "We are honored to be cho-

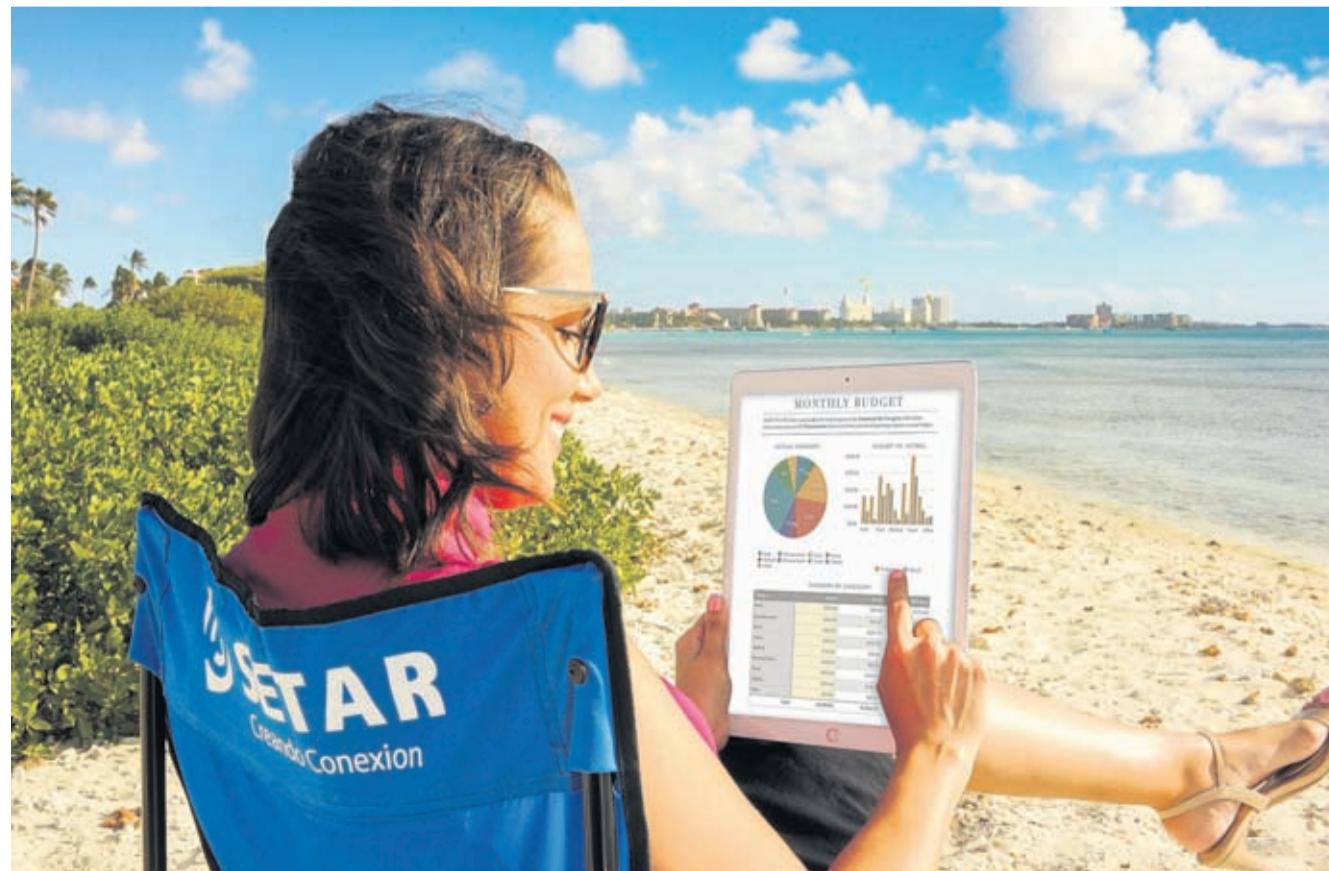
sen to host this prestigious group, with each speaker a success story and expert achiever in sustainable solutions that can be applied in Aruba and globally," shares Ewald Biemans, Owner/CEO of Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort. "Sustainability is no longer an option in our current state of global heating and it is important that we have the opportunities to learn how to protect our environment for future generations." Biemans, who is widely recognized as one of the Caribbean's most noted eco-pioneers, was a speaker at

the conference. He shared the journey to becoming the first, and still only, certified Carbon Neutral-Hotel in the Caribbean. As the visionary of the Caribbean's most eco-certified hotel, Biemans spotlighted the environmental benefits it provides both locally and globally. The conference focused on technology perspectives for hotels, offices, airports, and residential buildings. Participants could hear expert panel discussions and join in one-to-one networking sessions with attendees, government officials, world-class



experts, and leading companies from Germany and the Caribbean. For Bucuti & Tara's Sustainability and Environmental program: www.bucuti.com/resort/eco-friendly. □

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ORANJESTAD — Arikok National Park is home to various unique plant and animal species such as Aruba's rare endemic rattlesnake *Crotalus unicolor*. This rattlesnake is locally known as the 'Cascabel'. But Aruba has two more snake species living on the island: the Santanero and the Boa.

Cascabel (*Crotalus unicolor*)

The small Cascabel or Aruba Island Rattlesnake averages 70 cm in length. The body color is often uniform gray or light brown. There may be a faint pattern of

diamond shaped markings on the back. This pattern is most noticeable on younger snakes. The most distinctive feature of this snake is the rattle at the end of its tail which makes a buzzing sound when the snake is alarmed. Cascabels are shy and not aggressive, but their venom can be dangerous to humans. It is best to leave this snake alone. Do not attempt to catch or kill it. Cascabels hunt by waiting under bushes and fruiting trees to catch passing lizards, mice, rats, small rabbits, and an occasional bird. This is often considered to be one of the rarest

Snakes of Aruba

rattlesnakes in the world. The range of the Cascabel is restricted to the rugged and mountainous areas of the island mostly within Arikok National Park. The Arikok National Park was designated in the early 1980s to include most of the rattlesnake's population, providing a safe refuge in which the snake can be protected and monitored. The government has also implemented outreach and education initiatives to change local perception of the snake and highlight its ecological and economic importance – it is now being promoted as a national symbol. Arikok's partnership with the Toledo zoo has safeguarded the rattlesnake ex-situ and led to a number of research projects collecting critical data on the Cascabel's abundance, life history and habitat requirement to help guide future conservation efforts.

Santanero

The slender Santanero or Aruban Cat-eyed Snake

is typically less than 50 cm long. This snake is recognizable by the large scales on the top of its head and by its pattern of dark brown bands alternating with light brown bands. The belly is plain white or cream colored without any markings. This snake is shy and not aggressive. However, it has enlarged teeth at the back of its mouth and mild venom which is not dangerous to humans. However, the venom can paralyze small lizards and frogs. Santaneros are most active at night when they search for food. During the day, they hide under rocks or leaves. They frequently climb trees and cactus. Santaneros eat toads, frogs, insects, and lizards. You may find Santaneros near dams during periods of rainy weather or crossing roads at night. This snake is found island wide. A Santanero in your garden will keep away the unwanted insects. If you encounter a Santanero around your garden, please do not harm this species.

Boa (*Boa constrictor*)

Boas are Aruba's largest snakes. The longest Boa found on the island was slightly less than 3 m. Newborn Boas average 35 cm. Boas are not venomous. The most distinctive feature of a Boa is its pattern of dark brown and tan blotches which become red toward the tail. The belly is white or cream colored with numerous black spots. Boas are excellent climbers and may be found in trees and cactus. Boas also hide in the leaves under bushes waiting to catch prey that pass. Boas catch their prey with their teeth and then constrict it in their coils. The Boa's diet consists of birds, lizards, rats, mice, and rabbits. Large Boas have been known to eat small goats and chickens. When threatened, Boas will hiss loudly. Boas are a non-native species. The first Boas were reported on the island in 1999. Since that time they have been found across the entire island in all types of habitats. Source: National Park Aruba. □

Aruba to me

ORANJESTAD — You are back and we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

Complete the sentence: Aruba to me is Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: news@arubatoday.com and we will publish your vacation memory. Isn't that a special way to keep your best moments alive? Please do note: By submitting photos, text or any other materials, you give permission to The Aruba Today Newspaper, Caribbean Speed Printers and any of its affiliated companies to use said materials, as well as names, likeness, etc. for promotional purposes without compensation.

Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received an amazing story from **Allison Braswell**. She wrote:

Aruba to me...

"Ok where do I start, I just came home from Aruba last week and this was my third trip since they opened the borders this past July and my seventh trip to Aruba. As always it was a fabulous trip on my favorite island. This trip my oldest daughter Kayla and her girlfriend Taylor soon to be fiancé came and it was their first trip ever to Aruba and they absolutely loved it. This trip I would love to give a huge shout out to a friend of mine Brenda James who works for the Tamarijn Hotel. She plays the music at night for the Divi and Tamarijn and is the manager of the entertainment there I believe. We became friends over my last few visits there. This past visit I encountered an issue with other guest who had a issue with my hair and I got judged on it and it was very upsetting. At the time when this happened I was with Brenda talking in the lobby and she stepped in and handled and diffused the situation so well, it couldn't have been handled any better than what she did for me. I also wanna thank the staff that was present at the time at the



Tamarijn the bartenders, waitress and the cooks at the bar where all so professional and caring about this. So thank you to all my Tamarijn family.

During this trip I also got to see the exotic Bully dogs again and wanna thank Jeremy Tromp for always bringing the dogs out to see me and my family when we visit Aruba. I got to meet his beautiful wife and children also and they are truly an amazing family. Aruba to me is family and the most beautiful, kind



hearted people I have ever met. The island is beautiful, beaches are amazing, the water is as blue as it can get. Aruba touches my soul and makes me forget about any worries, stress and just makes me the happiest person ever. I have met the most wonderful people over the years and we have all become great friends and keep in touch always no matter how far apart we are from each other. So until next time Aruba, be safe and see you all soon." □

'Lighting a fuse': Amazon vote may spark more union pushes

By JOSEPH PISANI and BILL BARROW

The Associated Press

What happens inside a warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama, could have major implications not just for the country's second-largest employer but the labor movement at large.

Organizers are pushing for some 6,000 Amazon workers there to join the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union on the promise it will lead to better working conditions, better pay and more respect. Amazon is pushing back, arguing that it already offers more than twice the minimum wage in Alabama and workers get such benefits as health care, vision and dental insurance without paying union dues.

The two sides are fully aware that it's not just the Bessemer warehouse on the line. Organizers hope what happens there will inspire thousands of workers nationwide — and not just at Amazon — to consider unionizing and revive a labor movement that has been waning for decades. "This is lighting a fuse, which I believe is going to spark an explosion of union organizing across the country, regardless of the results," says RWDSU president Stuart Appelbaum.

The union push could spread to other parts of Amazon and threaten the company's profits, which soared 84% last year to \$21 billion. At a time when many companies were cutting jobs, Amazon was one of the few still hiring, bringing on board 500,000 people last year alone to keep up with a surge of online orders.

Bessemer workers finished casting their votes on Monday. The counting begins on Tuesday, which could take days or longer depending on how many votes are received and how much time it takes for each side to review. The process is being overseen by the National Labor Relations Board and a majority of the votes will decide the final outcome.

What that outcome will



A banner encouraging workers to vote in labor balloting is shown at an Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Ala., on Tuesday, March 30, 2021.

Associated Press

be is anyone's guess. Appelbaum thinks workers who voted early likely rejected the union because Amazon's messaging got to them first. He says momentum changed in March as organizers talked to more workers and heard from basketball players and high-profile elected officials, including President Joe Biden.

For Amazon, which employs more than 950,000 full- and part-time workers in the U.S. and nearly 1.3 million worldwide, a union could lead to higher wages that would eat into its profits. Higher wages would also mean higher costs to get packages to shoppers' doorsteps, which may prompt Amazon to raise prices, says Erik Gordon, a professor at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business.

In a statement, Amazon says it encouraged all its employees to vote and that "their voices will be heard in the days ahead." Any push to unionize is considered a long shot, since labor laws tend to favor employers. Alabama itself is a "right-to-work" state, which allows workers in unionized shops to opt out of paying union dues even as they retain the benefits and job protection negoti-

ated by the union.

Kent Wong, the director of the UCLA Labor Center, says companies in the past have closed stores, warehouses or plants after workers have voted to unionize. "There's a history of companies going to great lengths to avoid recognizing the union," he says.

Walmart, the nation's largest retailer and biggest private employer, has successfully fought off organizing efforts over the years. In 2000, it got rid of butchers in 180 of its stores after they voted to form a union. Walmart said it cut the jobs because people preferred pre-packaged meat. Five years later, it closed a store in Canada where some 200 workers were close to winning a union contract. At the time, Walmart said demands from union negotiators made it impossible for the store to sustain itself. The only other time Amazon came up against a union vote was in 2014, when the majority of the 30 workers at a Delaware warehouse turned it down.

This time around, Amazon has been hanging anti-union signs throughout the Bessemer warehouse, including inside bathroom stalls, and holding mandatory meetings to convince workers why the union is

a bad idea, according to one worker who recently testified at a Senate hearing. It has also created a website for employees that tells them they'll have to pay \$500 in union dues a month, taking away money that could go to dinners and school supplies.

Amazon's hardball tactics extend beyond squashing union efforts. Last year, it fired a worker who organized a walkout at a New York warehouse to demand greater protection against coronavirus, saying the employee himself flouted distancing rules. When Seattle, the home of its headquarters, passed a new tax on big companies in 2018, Amazon protested by stopping construction of a new high-rise building in the city; the tax was repealed four weeks later. And in 2019, Amazon ditched plans to build a \$2.5 billion headquarters for 25,000 workers in New York after pushback from progressive politicians and unions.

Beyond Amazon is an anti-union culture that dominates the South. And unions have lost ground nationally for decades since their peak in the decades following World War II. In 1970, almost a third of the U.S. workforce belonged

to a union. In 2020, that figure was 10.8%, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Private sector workers now account for less than half of the 14.3 million union members across the country.

Advocates say a victory would signal a shift in the narrative about unions, helping refute the typical arguments from companies, including Amazon, that workers can win adequate compensation and conditions by dealing with management directly.

"It is because of unions that we have a five-day work week. It is because of unions that we have safer conditions in our places of work. It is because of unions that we have benefits," says Rep. Terri Sewell, whose congressional district includes the Amazon facility.

"Workers should have the right to choose whether they organize or not."

Union leaders are circumspect about specific organizing plans after the Bessemer vote, and Appelbaum says he doesn't want to tip off Amazon to any future efforts. But there is broad consensus that a win would spur workers at some of the 230 other Amazon warehouses to mount a similar union campaign.

It's less clear whether any ripple effects would reach other prime targets like Walmart and the expansive auto industry that has burgeoned across the South in recent decades. Both have largely succeeded at keeping unions at bay.

The auto workers union has had some of the largest union pushes of the last decade, but their most intense and publicized efforts ended in failure. In 2017, a years-long campaign to unionize a Nissan plant in Canton, Mississippi, ended with a decisive 2,244-1,307 rejection of the union — the kind of margin that would be devastating in Bessemer. Two years later, however, Volkswagen workers in Tennessee had a much more evenly split vote, with 776 workers supporting unionization and 833 voting against it. □

Two space fans get seats on billionaire's private flight

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — A billionaire's private SpaceX flight filled its two remaining seats Tuesday with a scientist-teacher and a data engineer whose college friend actually won a spot but gave him the prize.

The new passengers: Sian Proctor, a community college educator in Tempe, Arizona, and Chris Sembroski, a former Air Force missileman from Everett, Washington. They will join flight sponsor Jared Isaacman and another passenger for three days in orbit this fall.

Isaacman also revealed some details about his Inspiration4 mission, as the four gathered Tuesday at NASA's Kennedy Space Center. He's head of Shift4 Payments, a credit card-processing company in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and is paying for what would be SpaceX's first private flight



In this photo provided by SpaceX, Chris Sembroski, from left to right, Jared Isaacman, Hayley Arceneaux and Sian Proctor pose for a photo, Monday, March 29, 2021, at the SpaceX launch pad at NASA's Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral, Fla.

Associated Press

while raising money for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee.

Their SpaceX Dragon cap-

sule currently parked at the International Space Station for NASA will launch no earlier than mid-September, aiming for an altitude of 335 miles (540 kilometers).

That's 75 miles (120 kilometers) higher than the International Space Station and on a level with the

Hubble Space Telescope. The capsule will be outfitted with a domed window in place of the usual space station docking mechanism for their trip.

Isaacman, 38, a pilot who will serve as spacecraft commander, still won't say how much he's paying. He's donating \$100 million to St. Jude, while donors so far have contributed \$13 million, primarily through the lottery that offered a chance to fly in space.

Hayley Arceneaux, 29, was named to the crew a month ago. The St. Jude physician assistant was treated there as a child for bone cancer. That left two capsule seats open. Proctor, 51, beat out 200 businesses and nabbed the seat reserved for a customer of Isaacman's company. An independent panel of judges chose her space art website dubbed Space2inspire. □



In this undated photo provided by Virgin Galactic is the VSS Imagine, the first SpaceShip III in the Virgin Galactic Fleet in Mojave, Calif.

Associated Press

Virgin Galactic rolls out latest generation of spaceship

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN
Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Virgin Galactic rolled out its newest spaceship Tuesday as the company looks to resume test flights in the coming months at its headquarters in the New Mexico desert.

Company officials said it will likely be summer before the ship — designed and manufactured in California — undergoes glide flight testing at Spaceport America in southern New Mexico. That will coincide with the final round of testing for the current generation of spacecraft, which

will be the one that takes British billionaire and Virgin Galactic founder Sir Richard Branson to the fringes of space later this year. CEO Michael Colglazier said the addition of the new ship marks the beginning of Virgin Galactic having a fleet that will one day be capable of ferrying paying customers and scientific payloads from spaceports around the globe. The company is still aiming for commercial operations to begin next year following testing and a few months of downtime for maintenance and other upgrades.

Virgin Galactic has reached space twice before — the first time from California in December 2018. The company marked its second successful glide flight over Spaceport America last June.

Virgin Galactic is one of a few companies looking to cash in on customers with an interest in space. □

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By Dave Green

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Metcalf loves her 'weirdo B storyline' on TV's 'The Conners'

By ALICIA RANCILIO

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Laurie Metcalf smiles and laughs when she thinks of her character Jackie and her assorted misadventures on the "Roseanne" spinoff, "The Conners."

Dating back to her introduction in Roseanne Barr's 1988's sitcom, Jackie has reinvented herself many times over. She's been a cop, a truck driver, a factory worker, co-owner of The Lanford Lunch Box (which was reopened on "The Conners), and was for a time, as the character describes it, "Lanford's leading life coach."

The role earned Metcalf three Emmy Awards while "Roseanne" was on the air, but she's content with Jackie being a supporting role.

"A little bit of Jackie goes a long way, so I'm always the weirdo B storyline. Too much of Jackie would be just overdose."

While the character's overall persona has remained unchanged through both series, it's provided a chance to grow as an actor. When "Roseanne"



Actress Laurie Metcalf arrives at the 75th annual Golden Globe Awards in Beverly Hills, Calif. on Jan. 7, 2018.

started, Metcalf was a theater actor with no experience in television.

"Everything was new to me. I had a big learning curve to jump into a multi-camera sitcom. The writers started writing to each one of our different strengths," Metcalf recalled.

"I'm assuming that one of

my strengths was to be this victimized loser who didn't have a clue that's what she was to begin with," she said laughing. "But (Jackie) just went out every day with her head up and determined to do something great or make something. And then it would all come collapsing down around her. But, she

had definite, firm opinions about things. And she still to this day meddles in the rest of the family's business, even though her own life is collapsing around her." That sometimes involves Jackie's romantic interests, which have been played by actors including George Clooney, Jim Varney and

Associated Press

Matthew Broderick. She also dabbled in a throuple but that was short-lived because Metcalf says, "Jackie was clueless." Her current love interest is Neville, portrayed by Nat Faxon.

"It's so funny now when we go to work because we're wearing masks all through the week and we don't see each other until they say, 'Action.' We drop our mask and we tape the scene and then we put them right back on again. So, I didn't know what Nat even looked like for the first episode we did together until they said, 'Action' and then I saw his whole face." Filming has wrapped on "The Conners" season three and the cast is waiting to see if they'll be renewed by ABC for a fourth season. Metcalf said there's more to be seen from Jackie, including whether she has any actual life coaching experience.

"One of my regrets was that you never really got to see her at work advising someone, so in hindsight there's a tiny piece of me that wonders if she just lied about the whole thing," said Metcalf. □

BTS condemns anti-Asian racism, says they've experienced it



In this Jan. 26, 2020, file photo, South Korean K-pop band BTS arrives for the 62nd annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles. BTS released a statement condemning racism against Asians and Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) on Tuesday, March 30, 2021.

By JUWON PARK

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP)

— K-pop superstar group BTS has condemned racism against Asians, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in a statement say-

ing they've experienced it themselves.

"We stand against racial discrimination," BTS tweeted Tuesday in English and Korean. The band said their own painful encounters with racism included

"expletives" and being "mocked for the way they look."

BTS issued their statement after recent attacks against people with Asian heritage in the United States, which have risen during the coronavirus pandemic. A white gunman recently killed eight people, including six women of Asian descent, at Atlanta-area massage businesses. "We cannot put into words the pain of becoming the subject of hatred and violence," the band said in the statement, adding that their experiences made them feel powerless and chipped away at their self-esteem. In February, a German radio station drew ire when a host compared the band to the coronavirus. The band said that although the discrimination they

endured is "inconsequential" compared to "events that have occurred over the past few weeks," they felt the need to speak out.

"What's happening right now cannot be disassociated from our identity as Asians," the band said. Many Asian Americans believe the Atlanta shootings were racially motivated. Police say they are still trying to determine a motive.

High-profile stars of Asian descent like Steven Yeun, Simon Liu and Sandra Oh have been vocal about spreading awareness of anti-Asian violence. "I am proud to be Asian! We belong here," Oh shouted into a megaphone at a Stop Asian Hate rally in Pittsburgh last week. BTS is one of the first South Korean bands to openly condemn anti-Asian rac-

ism. K-pop bands are known to be careful about maintaining personas created by their labels, which often muzzle stars on touchy subjects like race and mental health.

BTS has addressed racial discrimination and violence. In 2020, the band donated \$1 million to the Black Lives Matter movement, which was quickly matched by their fans within a day, according to "One In An ARMY," a global fundraising team made up of BTS fans. □

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9	2	4	5	7	3	8	6	1
7	8	3	9	6	1	2	5	4
5	6	1	2	4	8	9	3	7

Difficulty Level ★★★

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Analysis: Triple-doubles no longer a rarity in the NBA

By TIM REYNOLDS

It's the 3-point era in the NBA. The massive-salary era. The LeBron James era. It's also the triple-double era.

If it seems like triple-doubles are happening more often than ever, that's because they are — by a huge margin. On average, the NBA has seen someone put up at least 10 of this, 10 of that and 10 of those in one out of every seven games this season.

The rate of them happening is up 47% over last season, plus represents a staggering increase of nearly 700% over how often they occurred just nine years ago — when there were 18 in the entire 2011-12 season.

They happen with amazing regularity now. That doesn't mean everyone is enthralled.

"I get it. They're nice, round numbers and people get into those things in sports," New Orleans coach Stan Van Gundy said. "But I've never really been one who thought a whole lot of the whole triple-double thing." He's right. Some of them don't seem to have much of an impact on the game. Then there's what Russell



Washington Wizards guard Russell Westbrook (4) grabs the ball next to Detroit Pistons center Isaiah Stewart (28) during the second half of an NBA basketball game Saturday, March 27, 2021, in Washington.

Associated Press

Westbrook — the triple-double king — did Monday night.

Westbrook had 35 points, 14 rebounds and 21 assists to lead Washington to a win. It was only the third time someone had that many points and that many assists in an NBA game; throw in the rebounds, and Westbrook's night was unprecedented.

"He does things I've never seen and I've been in this league for 30 years," Washington coach Scott Brooks said. "He's a winner."

If people are bored by the triple-double, it might be Westbrook's fault. He's been making them seem like nightly happenings for years.

The reasons for the rise leaguewide in triple-dou-

bles are many, but two of them are clear: the "freedom of movement" emphasis in officiating favors the offensive player, so that means more points and more assists. So, too, does the increase pace of play, which also leads to more rebound opportunities. There are about eight more possessions and eight more shot attempts per team as

compared to nine years ago, and every possession leads to a statistic of some sort.

"To me, they're such arbitrary numbers," Van Gundy said. "What, if you get 10, 10 and 10 that's better than 35, nine and nine? ... There's a big difference between 15 points and 35 points. There's a big difference between 10 rebounds and 18 rebounds. And there's a big difference between 10 assists and 17 assists. So, to say a triple-double is a measure of a great game, I don't know."

This will be the fifth consecutive year that the NBA has seen players collect at least 100 triple-doubles; there were 99 this season through Monday and 551 in the last five seasons, with this one only barely past the halfway mark. Westbrook leads the league with 16 already, followed by Denver's Nikola Jokic and Brooklyn's James Harden with 12 apiece, then Dallas' Luka Doncic with nine. Put another way, we've seen as many triple-doubles in the last five years as in the 15 seasons before that combined.

Even some players seem less-than-impressed by them these days. □

Raised fists, kneeling during anthem OK at U.S. Olympic trials

By EDDIE PELLS
AP National Writer

The U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee will not sanction athletes for raising their fists or kneeling during the national anthem at Olympic trials, previewing a contentious policy it expects to stick to when many of those same athletes head to Tokyo this summer.

The USOPC released a nine-page document Tuesday to offer guidance about the sort of "racial and social demonstrations" that will and won't be allowed by the hundreds who will compete in coming months for spots on the U.S. team. The document comes three months after the federation, heeding calls from

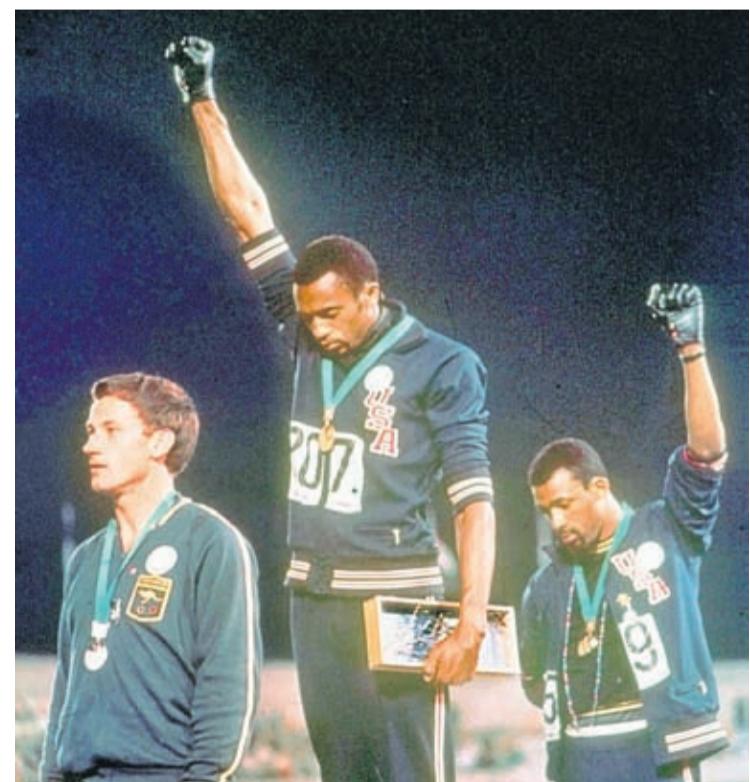
its athletes, determined it would not enforce long-standing rules that ban protests at the Olympics.

The International Olympic Committee's Rule 50 is an ongoing source of friction across the globe. Many U.S. athletes have spearheaded the call for more freedom in using their platform at the Olympics to advance social justice causes. But others, both in and outside the U.S., balk at widespread rule changes that they fear could lead to demonstrations that sully their own Olympic experiences. The wide-ranging debate traces its most-visible roots to the ouster of U.S. sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos from the 1968 Games. Their raised

fists on the medals stand in Mexico City led to the seminal snapshot of social protest in sports history.

With guidance from its recently formed Council on Racial and Social Justice, the USOPC released a list of do's and don'ts as part of its document. The list of allowable forms of demonstration included holding up a fist, kneeling during the anthem and wearing hats or face masks with phrases such as "Black Lives Matter" or words such as "equality" or "justice."

Not allowed are hate symbols, as defined by the Anti-Defamation League, and actions that would impede others from competing, such as laying down in the middle of the track. □



In this Oct. 16, 1968, file photo, U.S. athletes Tommie Smith, center, and John Carlos extend gloved hands skyward in racial protest during the playing of national anthem after Smith received the gold and Carlos the bronze for the 200 meter run at the Summer Olympic Games in Mexico City. Australian silver medalist Peter Norman is at left.

Associated Press

Supreme Court case could change the nature of college sports

By JESSICA GRESKO

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Supreme Court case being argued this week amid March Madness could erode the difference between elite college athletes and professional sports stars.

If the former college athletes who brought the case win, colleges could end up competing for talented student athletes by offering over-the-top education benefits worth tens of thousands of dollars. And that could change the nature of college sports.

At least that's the fear of the NCAA. But the former athletes who sued say most college athletes will never play professional sports and that the NCAA's rules capping education benefits deprive them of the ability to be rewarded for their athletic talents and hard work. They say the NCAA's rules are not just unfair but illegal, and they want schools to be able to offer any education benefits they see fit.

"This is letting the schools provide encouragement to be better students and better educated ... in return for what amounts to full-time jobs for the school. What could possibly be wrong with that?" said lawyer Jeffrey L. Kessler in an interview ahead of arguments in the case, which are scheduled for Wednesday.

The former players have so far won every round



In this March 20, 2021, file photo the March Madness logo is shown on the court during the first half of a men's college basketball game in the first round of the NCAA tournament at Bankers Life Fieldhouse in Indianapolis.

Associated Press

of the case. Lower courts agreed that NCAA rules capping the education-related benefits schools can offer Division I men's and women's basketball players and football players violate a federal antitrust law. The narrow ruling still keeps schools from directly paying athletes, but the NCAA says it is a step in that direction.

In an interview, the NCAA's chief legal officer Donald Remy defended the association's rules. He said the Supreme Court has previously found preserving the amateur nature of college sports to be an "appropriate, pro-competitive justification for the restrictions that exist in the system of college athletics."

The NCAA wasn't happy with the outcome the last time its rules were before the Supreme Court. In 1984, the high court rejected NCAA rules restricting the broadcast of college football. The justices' ruling transformed college sports, helping it become the multi-billion dollar business it is today.

This time, the justices will hear arguments by phone as they have been doing for almost a year because of the coronavirus pandemic. And the public can listen live. The justices will almost certainly issue a decision in the case before they leave for their summer break at the end of June. A ruling for the former players doesn't necessarily

mean an immediate infusion of cash to current college athletes. Currently, athletic scholarships can cover the cost of college athletes' attendance at college. That includes tuition, housing and books, plus a stipend determined by each school meant to cover things like travel expenses and other incidentals. What a ruling for the students means is that the NCAA can't bar schools from sweetening their offers to Division I basketball and football athletes with additional education-related benefits.

Individual athletic conferences could still set limits.

But Kessler said he believes that if his clients win, "very many schools" will ultimately

offer additional benefits. That would mean that to compete for the best players, colleges might offer things like postgraduate scholarships, tutoring, study abroad opportunities, vocational school payments, computer equipment and internships, among other things. And there's a fear some schools might try to disguise other, improper benefits as permissible education spending.

The former college athletes have some big-time supporters. The players associations of the NFL, NBA and WNBA along with a group of former NCAA executives are all urging the justices to side with the former athletes, as is the Biden administration.

Whatever happens at the high court, how college athletes are compensated is already likely changing. The NCAA is in the process of trying to amend its longstanding rules to allow athletes to profit from their names, images and likenesses. That would allow them to earn money for things like sponsorship deals, online endorsement and personal appearances.

Those efforts have stalled, however. For their part, players at this month's March Madness tournament have been pushing for reform with the hashtag #NotNCAAProperty on social media. □

Bautista Agut survives to oust Isner in 3 sets at Miami Open



Roberto Bautista Agut, of Spain, serves to John Isner during the Miami Open tennis tournament, Tuesday, March 30, 2021, in Miami Gardens, Fla.

Associated Press

By TIM REYNOLDS

MIAMI (AP) — Roberto Bau-

ista Agut didn't take the easiest route to the Miami Open quarterfinals.

The No. 7 seed from Spain fought off a match point before ousting former Miami champion and No. 18 seed John Isner of the U.S. 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (7) on Tuesday — his second three-set win in as many matches so far in the tournament.

Bautista Agut will face either top-seeded Daniil Medvedev of Russia or unseeded Frances Tiafoe of the U.S. in the quarterfinals. The Medvedev-Tiafoe match is later Tuesday. Bautista Agut lost the first

point of the third-set tie-breaker on his serve, giving the big-hitting Isner the early edge. Isner lost the mini-break by putting a forehand into the net five points later, then gave himself match point after a 138 mph ace for a 6-5 edge. Bautista Agut wasn't fazed, won three of the last four points and escaped.

"He makes always difficult matches playing against him," Bautista Agut said. "He has a very big serve and a lot of power from baseline with the forehand. It makes it always difficult, no?"

It was Isner's earliest Mi-

ami exit since 2017, when he lost in the third round. He won the tournament in 2018 and lost the final in 2019 to Roger Federer in straight sets.

No. 21 seed Jannik Sinner of Italy breezed to the quarterfinals with a 6-3, 6-2 win over Emil Ruusuvuori of Finland. All eight of the men's round-of-16 matches were set to be played Tuesday — Isner was one of four U.S. men to reach that round — as was a women's quarterfinal between top-seeded Ash Barty and seventh-seeded Aryna Sabalenka. □